

## Tompkins County Planning Department

# 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

### From the Commissioner

The diversity of projects and programs reported in this annual report is a testament to the “comprehensiveness” of comprehensive planning. In 2006 the Planning Department was deeply involved in projects addressing all of the major components of the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan. In fact, in reading through the draft report to pull out highlights it was difficult to decide what not to include. Among the diversity of accomplishments are: completion of the Housing Needs Assessment; closing on the first-ever State-aided Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights project in the County; economic development loans for RPM Ecosystems and rural small businesses; transportation studies addressing major highways, community walkability, and waterfront circulation; an inventory and assessment of the scenic views of Tompkins County . . . The list goes on and on.

There were also significant efforts to build on the Comprehensive Plan’s identification of important Natural Features and work toward their long-term conservation. The public outreach phase of the Natural Features Focus Areas project was completed ahead of schedule, and field inventories and analyses were conducted for a Sustainable Forest Management Plan for the 558 acres of County-owned forest land. The latter plan will ultimately allow the County forests to be certified as sustainably managed in accordance with the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council, recognized by many as the premier forest certification program in the world.

2006 also saw much discussion regarding the pattern of future development in the County and continuing interest in the nodal development concepts of the County Comprehensive Plan. The City of Ithaca’s Southwest Area vision statement established a goal of providing mixed-income infill housing in the urban center of the County. Planning efforts in the Village of Trumansburg and Town of Danby, the Route 13/366 Corridor Plan, and the planning partnership developed for the Route 96 Corridor in the City and Town of Ithaca and Town of Ulysses set the stage for the implementation of a nodal pattern for future development. This focus was supported by the realization of long-term efforts to obtain New York State Empire Zone designation to support employment growth in many of these nodes.

Just two years after its adoption, it is clear that the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan is playing the role that was envisioned for it: bringing local municipalities, citizens and organizations together to address important issues that will determine the economic health, environmental quality, social well-being, and future sustainability of the Tompkins County community. We have a long way to go but we’re off to a great start.

*Edward C. Marx, AICP*

Commissioner of Planning and Public Works



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Photos by staff

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# 2006 Goals, Objectives and Measures of Success

The Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan includes Principles, Policies and Actions that guide much of the work of the Planning Department. The Plan establishes a process for monitoring and reporting progress on plan implementation and the Planning Department began annual *Indicators of Success* reports in 2006. The *Indicators of Success* are intended to measure the community's progress and will depend upon many outside factors that may impact the pace of that progress. As part of this Annual Report we also want to measure our success in achieving our specific departmental goals and objectives for the year. Our goals and objectives do not reflect every activity undertaken by the department in 2006 and many of those other activities are described later in this report. We established two broad goals for 2006:

1. ***Continue to make substantive progress in implementing the actions identified in the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan.***
2. ***Effectively and efficiently administer the program responsibilities assigned to the Planning Department.***

Objectives, measures of success, and 2006 progress for each goal are outlined below.

**Goal 1, Objective 1:** Provide analysis and documentation of need that moves the discussion on affordable housing from problem recognition to community action.



*Measure of success:* Municipalities, not-for-profit agencies and other community partners take tangible new steps to develop, or promote development of, affordable housing in Tompkins County.

*End of year status:* Significant progress was made on this objective. The Housing Needs Assessment was completed in August. The Town of Lansing entered into a contract for Technical Assistance with the Planning Department to update the Town Zoning ordinance including provisions to allow for the development of affordable housing as part of the Town Center concept for South Lansing. The update of the County Economic Development Strategy, prepared by Tompkins County Area Development, identified housing development as one of three five-year strategic goals. The Mayor of the City of Ithaca convened a series of stakeholder meetings to mobilize action on meeting the community's affordable housing needs and the City adopted a vision statement for the Southwest Development Area that includes dense mixed-income housing. The Town of Ithaca began investigating an inclusionary zoning provision that would require an affordable housing component in new development. Late in the year the County Planning Advisory Board's Housing Committee approved the first draft of a Tompkins County Housing Strategy.

**Goal 1, Objective 2:** Substantially complete studies addressing Route 13 Corridor Management, Community Walkability in the Village of Trumansburg and Town of Ithaca, Ithaca North-side Waterfront Circulation, Inventory of Scenic Viewsheds, and a County Forest Management Plan.



*Measure of success:* Project schedules for each study are developed and adhered to.

*End of year status:* Consultants contracts were executed for all five projects. The Scenic Resource Inventory was completed in December. At year's end all of the other projects were well underway but slightly behind schedule due to a number of factors including consultant workload and delays due to difficulty in scheduling public or client committee meetings.

**Goal 1, Objective 3:** Continue to develop community partnerships to promote the protection and management of resources within the Natural Features Focus Areas and Agricultural Resource Focus Areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan.



*Measures of success:* 1) Complete the public information phase for the Riparian and Wetland Focus Areas and the Wildlife and Forest Focus Areas. 2) Close on Purchase of Development Rights for the Howser Farm in the Town of Lansing. 3) Work cooperatively with interested farmers, community partners and one or more municipalities to submit additional applications for Purchase of Development Rights grants for farms in the Agricultural Resource Focus Areas.



**End of year status:** 1) Not only was the public information phase completed for the Riparian, Wetland, Wildlife and Forest Focus Areas, but for all of the remaining focus areas as well, putting this project ahead of schedule. 2) The Howser Farm PDR was closed in August. 3) Applications were submitted and funding was approved for two additional PDR projects: the Benson Farm in Lansing and the Stuttle Farm in Dryden.

**Goal 1, Objective 4:** Implement the Rural Micro-enterprise program.



**Measure of success:** Close on three to five rural micro-enterprise loans in 2006.

**End of year Status:** Two loan proposals were presented to the Loan Oversight Committee in 2006. They were recommended for funding, approved by the Legislature and both closed during the summer. Upon recommendation from the Loan Oversight Committee, the program was made a permanent component of the County's Economic Development Loan Fund.

**Goal 1, Objective 5:** Re-institute the Flood Hazard Mitigation Program based on the watershed analyses conducted by our consultant, Milone and McBroom.



**Measure of success:** One or more municipalities have indicated an interest in partnering with the county on project(s) identified as priorities in the Milone and McBroom report, and a funding source has been identified for county participation.

**End of year status:** Reorganization of the Tompkins County Flood Hazard Mitigation Program, based on the findings of the report, was completed and one year funding was included in the adopted 2007 County budget. Findings of the Milone and McBroom report were used in the development of a watershed management strategy for the Six Mile Creek watershed, the Natural Features Focus Areas project, a water quality monitoring plan for Cayuga Lake, emerging watershed management efforts in the Fall Creek watershed, and volunteer monitoring efforts in Fall Creek and Six Mile Creek watersheds.

**Goal 1, Objective 6:** Continue progress on aquifer studies in the three partner communities of Dryden, Caroline and Danby.



**Measure of success:** Timelines for the studies are established and adhered to in cooperation with local sponsors and USGS.

**End of year status:** Continued support has been provided to the Virgil Creek (Dryden), Upper Six Mile Creek (Caroline) and Willseyville Creek (Caroline) surficial aquifers including the development of a recharge model of the Virgil Creek aquifer. Data collection was initiated for the Buttermilk Creek/Danby Creek surficial aquifer (Danby).

**Goal 1, Objective 7:** Facilitate and support local municipal efforts to incorporate nodal development concepts into local plans and regulations.



**Measure of success:** One or more municipalities have undertaken review of their comprehensive plans and/or land use regulations in order to support a more compact, concentrated development pattern in locally identified nodes.

**End of year status:** A technical assistance contract was executed to update the Town of Lansing's zoning in accordance with the recently updated Town Comprehensive Plan and County Comprehensive Plan. We assisted the Town of Danby with mapping work for their hamlet planning effort and began work with the Village of Trumansburg on their comprehensive plan. The Route 13/366 Corridor Management Plan began evaluation of a nodal development plan in the Town of Dryden.



**Goal 2, Objective 1:** Continue to provide contractual technical assistance to local municipalities.



*Measure of success:* Timelines for technical assistance efforts in Caroline, Danby and Trumansburg are established and carried out to the extent controllable by staff.

*End of year status:* The municipal assistance contract with the Town of Caroline expired at the end of May. Assistance was provided to complete the SEQR process for the Comprehensive Plan adoption. The plan was adopted on December 14, 2006. Limited assistance was provided under the Town of Danby contract with revisions of their recently adopted Subdivision and Zoning ordinances. Work with the Village of Trumansburg on their Comprehensive Plan consisted of assistance with development and analysis of a community survey and an inventory of existing conditions.

**Goal 2, Objective 2:** Reporting and administrative requirements are maintained for all programs administered by the Planning Department.



*Measure of success:* 1) All required reports for the Homeownership program, Stop-DWI program, Economic Development Revolving Loan Funds, and the Phase II Stormwater SPDES permit are submitted on time and in accordance with program requirements. 2) All program audits or reviews are satisfactory or better with no major violations of program rules. Any deficiencies are quickly corrected and resolved.

*End of year status:* The Home Ownership VII grant was up and running in December 2005 and all funds were committed in 2006. The semi-annual progress reports were prepared for submission to the Governor's Office for Small Cities. The grant funds were fully spent ahead of schedule. STOP-DWI financial reports were completed and submitted for 2001 through 2006. The required annual report for the County's Stormwater SPDES permit was completed.

**Goal 2, Objective 3:** Maintain support for Legislature's Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee and advisory committees.



*Measure of success:* Agendas, minutes and reports are prepared and distributed in a timely manner.

*End of year status:* Agendas and minutes have been prepared and distributed on schedule.



*Heron Rookery*

# Second Annual Report on Comprehensive Plan Implementation

The Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the County Legislature on December 21, 2004. The plan provides:

*The Planning Commissioner will report annually to the County Legislature on progress in implementing the Plan. This will include identification of action items that have been initiated and the results of those actions. The Commissioner's report will include measures of success by which to monitor the Plan's progress and any barriers to implementation that have been encountered. The appropriate measurement tools will be developed during the implementation process.*

## **Indicators of Success: 2006**

The first annual Indictors of Success report was published at the end of 2006. This report “include[s] measures of success by which to monitor the Plan’s progress.” The report provides fact-based information about trends over time in order to gauge how well the community is doing in achieving the principles and policies defined in the Comprehensive Plan. The report includes 37 measures that, over time, will include sufficient data to show trends. As this process began with the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 2004, clear trends cannot be identified. The Indicators of Success report is accompanied by a Technical Appendix that describes the sources and limitations of the data included in the report.

Following are descriptions of the Comprehensive Plan actions items identified in the Planning Department’s 2006 work plan along with highlights of actions undertaken by partner agencies. Together this Annual Report and the annual Indicators of Success report constitute the Commissioner’s annual progress report to the Legislature.

## **Housing Choices**



**Action: Produce a three- to five-year affordable housing needs assessment to use as a basis to guide development of appropriate subsidized rental and ownership housing to meet local needs.**

The Affordable Housing Needs Assessment was completed in August 2006. It documented a need for almost 4,000 housing units over the next ten years of which over 50% need to be affordable to households making 80% or less of median income.

**Action: Conduct a survey of in-commuters to determine the reasons they live outside of Tompkins County.**

Further analysis of the in-commuter survey, completed in 2005, was deferred to a future year.

**Action: Develop or identify model provisions for land regulations that encourage affordable housing.**

An intern assembled a file of existing model provisions and a summary describing each type.

**Action: Provide education and training programs for elected officials, board members, community leaders, developers and builders, and the general public on the need for and benefits of affordable housing development.**

### Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

In August Better Housing for Tompkins County completed their outreach program to local municipal officials and the public. The effort included a media campaign, trainings, workshops and ten community meetings all centered around the “Homes Within Reach” theme. Better Housing published a report on the results of that effort.

## Transportation Choices



**Action:** *Develop a bicycle suitability map for Tompkins County.*

Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

The Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council (ITCTC) completed a draft bicycle suitability map to be published in 2007.

**Action:** *Identify infill opportunities at nodes along transit lines.*

This action was partially implemented through the ongoing Route 13/366 Corridor Management Plan and pre-planning was begun for a project in the Route 96 Corridor.

**Action:** *Work with municipalities to assess transportation infrastructure needs, including roadways, transit, bicycles and pedestrians, to support local planning efforts.*

Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

The ITCTC solicited projects and worked with New York State Department of Transportation and local municipal sponsors to complete the update of the five-year New York State Transportation Improvement Program.

**Northside Waterfront Circulation Plan** - The Northside Waterfront Circulation Plan commenced early in 2006, with the creation of an oversight committee established by the Planning Advisory Board that includes several members of the Planning Advisory Board and representatives from the City of Ithaca. A team of consultants, headed by Stantec and

including Northeast Greenways and Rob Steuteville, was selected to undertake the analysis of vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit circulation in the area between Route 13 and Cayuga Inlet between the Farmers' Market and Buffalo Street. When completed, the plan should include options for addressing circulation as this area of the City develops.

**Action:** *Develop a countywide comprehensive park and ride plan.*

Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

The ITCTC completed analysis of the Park and Ride surveys of Cornell and downtown Ithaca employees and provided the results as input to the Cornell University Transportation-focused Generic Environmental Impact Statement (t-GEIS) process, the Cornell Comprehensive Master Plan, and Tompkins County Area Transit (TCAT) route planning efforts.

## Jobs and Business



**Action:** *Continue to lobby for State Empire Zone status and explore regional partnerships to share underutilized economic development resources.*

Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

Several years of tireless effort on the part of Tompkins County Area Development resulted in designation of an Empire Zone in Tompkins County in August 2006. An Empire Zone Administration Board was established, chaired by the Commissioner of Planning, and late in the year TCAD hired the first Empire Zone Coordinator for Tompkins County.



*Newfield Covered Bridge,  
listed on the National  
Register of Historic  
Places in 2000*



## Rural Resources



***Action: Update the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan with a particular focus on promoting the viability and profitability of agriculture within the County.***

Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

Much of the work for updating the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan (AFPP) was completed in 2005. During 2006 the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board further reviewed the document and prioritized action items. A final draft of the AFPP is expected by mid-2007.

***Action: Establish a program to protect and manage land for agricultural and forestry use in the focus areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan using tools appropriate to the functions of those resources.***

**Howser Farm** - In August 2006, Tompkins County and Lansing dairy farmer, Don Howser, closed on the first agricultural conservation easement in Tompkins County funded by state and federal programs. This permanent easement allows for continued agricultural use of the 439-acre property, but places restrictions on the use of the property for development purposes. The goal of the program is to help farmers continue agricultural operations and maintain the agricultural soils and land base for future farming endeavors while at the same time conserving scenic roadside resources, open space and unique natural habitats.

Located on State Route 34, the Howser farm is especially significant in that it includes substantial amounts of prime agricultural soils, extensive scenic road frontage, and a portion of the Locke Creek Corridor – an important tributary to Salmon Creek. The farm is located in the heart of one of the most important areas for agriculture in the County, as identified in the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan.

The process of acquiring the County's first agricultural easement started in 2003 when Don Howser approached the Cooperative Extension agriculture program expressing interest in selling development rights to his farmland. The Tompkins County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board reviewed the request and worked with Mr. Howser to submit a grant application to the State's Agricultural & Farmland Imple-

mentation Grants program. The Tompkins County Planning Department shepherded the project through to completion, by coordinating the work of the State, Federal and County agencies, commissioning appraisals and surveys of the property, writing the conservation easement, and documenting the condition of the land.

**Stuttle and Benson Farms** - Under the same state program that funded the Howser Farm easement, in October 2006, the County learned that it's joint grant applications with the Towns of Dryden and Lansing were accepted for funding. The grants will make it possible to protect the over 400-acre Lew-Lin Farm in the Town of Dryden and the nearly 1000-acre Bensvue Farm in the Town of Lansing.

The Bensvue farm, owned by C. Charles Benson and Andra Benson, is a 610-cow dairy farm transitioning to organic production. For the Bensons, the State funding will allow them to achieve the goal of protecting the farm so that their children and grandchildren may continue in the farming profession. Lew-Lin farm, owned by Lewis, Linda, Steven, and Lisa Stuttle, is a 420-cow dairy farm just outside the Village of Dryden. Like the Bensons, farming is their way of life and the State grant funds will ensure that their farm is protected for generations to come.

The Town of Dryden and the Town of Lansing will each partner with the Tompkins County Planning Department to implement the grant-funded project and co-hold the easement. This marks the first time that either town has received funding for a project under this State program. The process is expected to take up to two years. During that time the property will be inventoried, legal documents and agreements drawn up, and a monitoring plan established. The Tompkins County Planning Department, having recently successfully completed this process for the Howser Farm in Lansing, is offering technical assistance to the towns for both projects.

**Sustainable Forestry** - 2006 saw continued progress in the preparation of a forest management plan for the County-owned forest lands by Bevan Forestry, a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified forestry consultant. The consultant prepared maps; conducted timber and forest inventories, growth studies and analyses; and laid the foundation for developing a forest management plan that conforms to FSC guidelines. In 2007, it is anticipated that Bevan Forestry will present the Forest Management Plan to elected officials, members of the Planning Advisory Board, and neighboring and large forest landowners at meetings to be held in Tompkins County.



## Water Resources



### ***Action: Continue to conduct aquifer studies.***

The United States Geological Survey (USGS), Tompkins County, and the Town of Danby initiated the Upper Buttermilk/Danby Creek surficial aquifer study to help explore the vulnerabilities of and potential impacts of growth on the surficial aquifer. This multi-jurisdictional partnership helped leverage supplemental funding from Senator Seward's office to complete the study.

Additionally, USGS, Tompkins County, and the towns of Dryden and Caroline made further progress on the study of the Virgil Creek, the Upper Six Mile Creek, and the Willseyville Creek surficial aquifers. As part of the Virgil Creek surficial aquifer study, USGS is developing a model that will help local officials better understand the capacity, vulnerability, direction of flow, and rate of aquifer recharge under various scenarios including existing and proposed development.

### ***Action: Update the county flood hazard mitigation program to incorporate watershed-based approaches to reducing the risk of flood damages.***

The Tompkins County Planning Department and Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District began the formal restructuring of the Tompkins County Flood Hazard Mitigation Program (TCFHMP). This process will include convening the Tompkins County Flood Hazard Mitigation Program Advisory Committee and developing a list of high priority flood mitigation, erosion control, and watershed management projects. County funds for the TCFHMP will be used to complete the high priority projects and to garner supplemental funding. The restructured TCFHMP is intended to increase the efficiency of funding and, ultimately, enhance flood protection and watershed management efforts throughout the County.

### ***Action: Define stream corridor buffers for the major tributaries to Cayuga Lake and encourage use of appropriate measures to preserve the designated stream corridors.***

### ***Action: Develop or identify model stream buffer ordinances.***



*Six Mile Creek*

The Tompkins County Planning Department completed "Enhancing Water Resources in Tompkins County: Benefits of Riparian Area and Stream Buffers," a guide that highlights the buffer widths necessary to sustain the many vital functions of stream buffers (including water quality improvement, flood mitigation and stormwater control, and provision of habitat). In addition, the Department commissioned Cornell University to develop a model for Tompkins County that identifies the land areas within the County that generate the most overland runoff to streams and thus have a particularly significant impact on water quality. The publication and results of the model will be integrated into the protection and management efforts for the Natural Features Focus Areas Project and the County's efforts to enhance water quality and stream buffers. The Tompkins County Planning Department is also working with the municipalities that are actively drafting laws to regulate activities adjacent to streams.

### ***Action: Prepare a Cayuga Lake water quality and quantity monitoring plan.***

The Tompkins County Water Resources Council secured grant funding to review data that will help the community address phosphorous and pathogen levels in Cayuga Lake, two issues that are critical to the overall health of the lake. The reports will be completed in 2007 and will be considered in the development of a monitoring plan for Cayuga Lake.

The Tompkins County Water Resources Council (WRC) also initiated the development of a strategic monitoring plan for the southern end of Cayuga Lake. This effort was supported by two new partnerships formed in 2006. The first is an unprecedented relationship between the WRC and Cornell University, the WRC/CU Cayuga Lake Monitoring Group, which was convened to address issues and concerns in the southern end of Cayuga Lake. The second partnership, consisting of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network Issues Committee and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization's Technical Advisory Committee, convened to address issues and concerns throughout the Cayuga Lake watershed. The WRC/CU Cayuga Lake Monitoring Group drafted a preliminary monitoring plan for the southern end of Cayuga Lake that will be presented to the public for feedback in the spring of 2007.

The goal of both partnerships is to foster greater collaboration among agencies and organizations with active monitoring programs, increase the efficiency of resources expended on monitoring efforts and the effectiveness of existing monitoring efforts, shape future monitoring efforts, assist local governments in their efforts to comply with relevant regulations and, ultimately, help water resources managers, regulators, agencies, and organizations better assess and manage the health of Cayuga Lake.

## Natural Features



**Action:** *Develop or obtain a system to track land use changes and preservation efforts.*

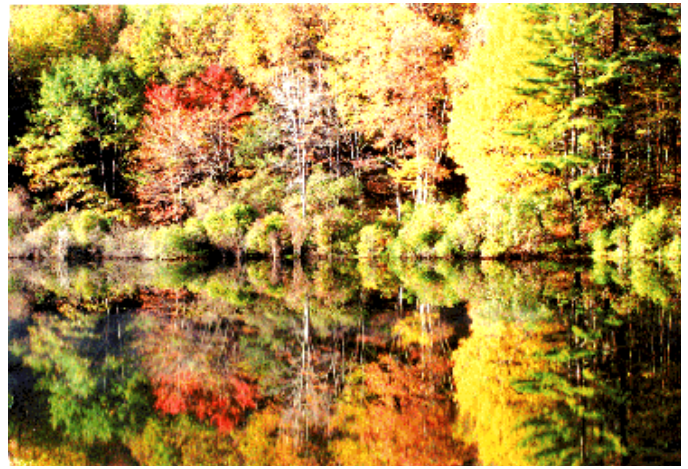
Tracking land use change provides critical information about current development patterns and trends for a variety of planning projects. Information on subdivisions, developed land, land conversion, and forested and agricultural land is tracked on an annual basis based on assessment records. In 2006 we completed this analysis for 2005 and 2006 tax parcels. An intern was hired during the summer to compile data and conduct most of the analysis. Based on the intern's work, Planning Department staff prepared detailed maps and tables documenting land use change in Tompkins County.

The Planning Department also tracks protected land, including State and municipal open space, land protected through conservation easements, nature preserves, and Cornell and Ithaca College Natural Areas. As part of the annual update of this information, Planning Department staff contacted agencies and municipalities to determine if any additional land has been protected in the past year. An extensive search of the Tompkins County Clerk's database was also conducted to identify properties with conservation easements.

**Action:** *Establish an open-space program to protect or preserve natural resources and recreational amenities in the focus areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan using tools appropriate to the functions of those resources.*

Tompkins County Planning Department staff analyzed and synthesized extensive Geographic Information Systems data available for Tompkins County and the region to assess the primary benefits provided by lands in each of the County's 14 Natural Features Focus Areas (NFFA). (These benefits include: Sustainable Timber Harvesting and Agro-forestry, Sustainable Agriculture, Hunting, Fishing, Water Quality, Flood Attenuation, Education and Research, Outdoor Recreation, Scenic Views, and Critical Habitat and Biodiversity.) The product of this work is a description of each NFFA, including information about the primary benefits provided by lands in the respective NFFAs, major features located within the respective NFFAs, and issues to consider in efforts to sustain these benefits and manage and protect important lands within the NFFAs. Staff solicited public comments and input on each of these summaries in nine public meetings held at various locations throughout the County. Development of protection and management plans for these areas will be completed in 2007.

The Finger Lakes Trail runs through several of the Natural Features Focus Areas and is an important regional recreational resource. In November 2006 the Tompkins County



*Autumn's colors*

Planning Department in collaboration with the Finger Lakes Land Trust applied for and was awarded a Quality Communities Grant to develop a Finger Lakes Trail Corridor Protection and Enhancement Plan. The grant funds will be used to hire a consultant.

**Action:** *Conduct a Scenic Resources Inventory and prepare a Scenic Resources Preservation Plan.*

Tompkins County is home to an abundance of picturesque landscapes that characterize this Finger Lakes region of central New York. The concentration of natural and cultural assets in Tompkins County has created areas of intense visual appeal, which are otherwise known as scenic resources. The scenic features in Tompkins County provide the backdrop to the community's daily interactions and form the basis of the County's overall beauty. Both visitors and residents alike treasure this resource. In order to preserve these scenic resources, it is important to begin with an understanding of what are the scenic resources. This study furthers that understanding by defining, inventorying and evaluating the views and bringing the discussion into the public forum. The Tompkins County Scenic Resources Inventory, which was begun in late 2005, was brought to substantial completion in 2006, with the final report being printed in January 2007.

The study documented 593 scenic resources in Tompkins County and generated a digital database of information pertaining to each of these views. The study further identified 25 Distinctive Views, 30 Noteworthy Views, and 10 categories of Characteristic Views. It also developed a methodology to enable interested municipalities to perform more detailed scenic resource inventories relating to their unique locales.





*Cascades at Buttermilk Falls State Park*

The study was conducted in four parts:

- **Inventory** — Documented publicly accessible scenic resources in Tompkins County along roadways, lakeshore, public parks and heavily used trails.
- **Scenic Resources Characterization** — Utilized public input to determine what characterizes a scenic resource and what aspects of a scenic view are most valued by community members.
- **Evaluation** — Extracted the highest quality scenic resources in the County from all inventoried scenic resources based on the public input that characterized scenic resources and input from a steering committee of the Planning Advisory Board.
- **Prioritization** — Used input from the public and the steering committee to select the top scenic resources into distinctive and noteworthy views of Tompkins County.

The resulting 25 Distinctive Views are ones that make a clear, unmistakable impression, and are distinguished as some of the best scenic views in the County. As an area known for Cayuga Lake, gorges, and waterfalls, it is not surprising that 92% of the Distinctive Views include water features. Fourteen of the 25 Distinctive Views are of the area's spectacular gorges, six include Cayuga Lake, and ten are located in one of the four State Parks in the County. All but one of the Distinctive Views include cliffs, ridgelines, or valleys.

The 30 Noteworthy Views are views worthy of attracting attention, and are better than many of the scenic views in the County. While 75% of the Noteworthy Views take in Cayuga Lake or another of the numerous scenic watercourses, this group includes more diversity than the Distinctive Views group. Almost half reflect a pastoral and agricultural landscape. They include more vistas and features from the built environment.

Characteristic Views are highly scenic though commonly seen, and are emblematic of the scenic views and overall character of Tompkins County. The Characteristic Views were selected from the inventory of 593 scenic resources and were chosen to represent the range of typical views for each of the ten characteristic categories. The categories are: Settlements, Farms and Fields, Cascades, Cayuga Lake, Distant Hillside, Ponds and Wetlands, Rural Roads, Streams, Trails and Heritage Qualities.

## Strong Communities



**Action:** *Conduct pedestrian level-of-service and walkability studies in neighborhoods, villages, and hamlets throughout the County.*

**Action:** *Work with municipalities to assess transportation infrastructure needs, including roadways, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians, to support local planning efforts.*

Walkability is more than just having the “right-of-way” to walk. Safety, convenience, efficiency, comfort and a welcoming atmosphere influence pedestrian accessibility on a designated route. Walkable communities generally include lively town centers, accessible neighborhood schools and parks, low-speed and connected streets and trails, and the presence of many people of all ages and abilities walking throughout the day. The Tompkins County Planning Department received federal Transportation, Community and Systems Preservation Program (TCSP) grant funding to undertake pilot programs to enhance walkability in two communities in Tompkins County. The two communities selected for this project were the Village of Trumansburg and Northeast Ithaca, which consists of parts of both the Town of Ithaca and the Village of Cayuga Heights. The project, begun in 2006, develops tools to identify and quantify both the overarching and location-specific issues that could be addressed to improve a community's walkability. The project team was made up of Planning staff, and consultants from Stantec Consulting and Northeast Greenways.

The intent of the project is to develop a methodology that can be used to help other interested communities evaluate and improve their walking conditions by outlining a method for collecting information on existing walking conditions and for developing recommendations and implementation strategies for improving walkability. Assessing the walkability of a community is a subjective process; what may be considered unsafe or unsightly to one may appear quaint and interesting to another. In order to better understand the perceptions and specific walkability concerns of the communities, the study took the following steps:

1. Reviewed local plans and proposals impacting walkability in the communities.
2. Studied examples of successful walkability initiatives and walkable communities in other parts of the United States.
3. Early in the project steering committees were established that were made up of residents and local officials. The committees provided input on key walkability issues and effective public outreach efforts frequently as the project progressed.
4. The project team and steering committee members walked the communities to identify areas of concern for walkability, as well as areas that are currently well served by pedestrian infrastructure.
5. A survey tool was developed to evaluate the walkability of an area. The survey was designed to be easy to use by individuals, community associations, and groups of residents. The survey was also designed for use along specific routes to identify barriers to pedestrian use, and opportunities to enhance the pedestrian experience. The survey was modified after field tests and input from the steering committees, and modified again after the community surveys were completed. As part of this step, available Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data from Tompkins County, Town of Ithaca and New York State were used to evaluate the pedestrian environment in the study areas, and a methodology for recording and analyzing the results of the survey tool was developed.
6. Public workshops were held in October 2006 in the communities to educate residents on walkability issues and train them on how to complete the survey.
7. The results of the surveys were integrated into a GIS coverage to better display the results.
8. Project goals were identified and prioritized to achieve enhanced walkability for this project.



*Ithaca's Cayuga Street*

## Centers of Development



**Action:** *Work with municipalities to develop land use scenarios consistent with the Plan and with local land use plans and policies.*

Route 13/366 Corridor Management Plan – Work began in 2006 with the Town and Village of Dryden to develop a management plan for the corridor extending east along Route 366 from the Town of Ithaca town line to its junction with Route 13, and then east along Route 13 through the Village to the Cortland County line. Route 13 is the only Principal Arterial highway in Tompkins County and preserving its function as the major transportation artery in the community is one of the objectives of the study. Working with a steering committee of Town and Village representatives, Fisher Associates began development of a nodal plan for the corridor, consistent with the Town and Village Comprehensive Plans. The plan will accommodate desired development while preserving the safety and transportation functions of these key elements of our transportation infrastructure.

## Efficient Use of Public Funds



**Action:** *Review responsibility for highway management and maintenance based on the function of the highways.*

Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

In 2006 the Tompkins County Highway Division of the Department of Public Works negotiated agreements in principle to undertake highway jurisdictional swaps with the Town of Ulysses and the Town of Ithaca. These swaps will better align road function with maintenance responsibility and will provide improved operational efficiencies for the respective highway departments.

**Action:** *Implement the countywide Public Safety Communications System project.*

Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

In 2006 construction of the communications infrastructure to implement the Public Safety Communications System project was initiated under the direction of the Department of Emergency Response.



## Other Department Activities



### *Housing Grant Administration*

The Homeownership program, administered by the Planning Department in partnership with Better Housing for Tompkins County, provided \$597,000 in assistance allowing 20 households to purchase homes.

**Construction of Affordable Units** - The County Homeownership Oversight Committee and the Planning Advisory Board recommended that the Homeownership program include new construction under certain conditions. The County Legislature approved those changes to the program rules.

### *Community Development Block Grant/Small Cities Economic Development Grant*

The Planning Department submitted a Small Cities Community Development Block Grant application and was awarded \$500,000 to provide a low interest working capital loan for the start-up and expansion of RPM Ecosystems in the Town of Dryden. The firm, which has a patented system for developing fast-growing trees and shrubs, largely for use in environmental restoration projects, will employ 56 full-time equivalent positions.

### *Local Government Assistance/Circuit Rider*

The Planning Department continued to work with the Town of Danby in accordance with their three-year General Planning Services contract. Danby's Code Revision Services Contract and Mapping Contract and Caroline's General Planning Services contract wrapped up in early 2006. Work with the Town of Danby in 2006 focused on assisting the Town in addressing their GIS mapping needs for subdivision review and providing detailed GIS information for the hamlet areas in preparation for their hamlet planning project.

The Planning Department also began work with the Village of Trumansburg on their comprehensive plan as part of a two-year planning contract. Work in 2006 included conducting a survey of village residents, preparing a detailed inventory of existing conditions, and preparing for two public workshops in January 2007.

### *Agricultural Districts Annual Update*

November is the designated annual review period when landowners of viable agricultural land can request to be included in an existing agricultural district. In March of 2006, the County Legislature approved the requests submitted by two landowners from the Town of Dryden for inclusion in Agricultural District #1. These two parcels total 71.36 acres. Neither parcel adjoins existing agricultural district land, although one is very close. Both are in predominantly rural and agricultural areas. The agricultural activities on these parcels are indicative of the types of operations that are

*Main Street in Dryden*



likely to request inclusion in an agricultural district as a result of the annual review process: rented farmland and small-scale equine and diversified operations.

### *Hazard Mitigation Coordination*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) granted final approval of the Tompkins County Multi-Jurisdictional All-Hazards Mitigation Plan (Plan). To initiate implementation of the Plan, the Tompkins County Planning Department worked with municipalities throughout the County to secure funding for high priority hazard mitigation activities, including select activities listed in the Plan as well as completion of hazard mitigation plans for the jurisdictions not included in the multi-jurisdictional Plan.

The Tompkins County Planning Department, working with Tompkins County Information Technology Services, also received training on the use of the HAZUS-Multi Hazard software, which is designed to help assess the risks and potential damages associated with emergency events and act as a central repository for relevant data.

### *Stormwater Coordination for SPDES Permit*

The Tompkins County Planning Department provides support to help the County meet the requirements of its State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit for stormwater (as required by the Phase 2 stormwater regulations). In addition, Tompkins County helps coordinate stormwater management activities among the municipalities affected by the Phase 2 stormwater regulations to ensure a cohesive and balanced approach to stormwater management that spans municipal boundaries.

### *Stormwater Outfall Mapping*

Tompkins County Planning Department and the Town of Ithaca are working cooperatively to assist municipalities affected by the Phase 2 stormwater regulations to map stormwater outfalls and discharges. This work is part of a four-year project that is being completed with a grant received by the Stormwater Coalition of Tompkins County.



*Caroline Town Hall, formerly  
Slaterville Springs District #2 School*

### **Land Policy Administration**

The Planning Department assists the County in managing its lands by maintaining a current inventory of all County landholdings and identifying surplus properties that should be sold or transferred to another entity. The Department also evaluates all properties that are subject to foreclosure each year and identifies properties that could serve a higher public good if protected in some way, or that pose liability issues to the County. By working with State agencies and other land protection organizations, the Planning Department evaluates each situation and recommends a course of action to the Legislature. Since the County land policy was first adopted in 1995, the Department has facilitated the sale and protection of 173 acres of important natural areas to groups including the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Finger Lakes Land Trust, and Cornell Natural Areas Program.

In March 2006, Planning, Assessment and Finance department staff visited 16 tax parcels subject to foreclosure for non-payment of taxes. Each parcel was evaluated for potential liability issues and natural or cultural resources of significance. None of the properties were identified as having significant strategic value to County government or significant natural resources worthy of protection for the benefit of the public good.

In the fall of 2006, State Parks purchased a vacant 7.64 acre surplus parcel of land in the Fleming Meadows Unique Natural Area from the County for its full appraised value of \$19,000. The land was of interest to the State because it contains important floodplain and wetland habitat adjacent to Buttermilk Falls State Park. The County first acquired the land in 1942 and the Highway Department stored materials on the site for many years. The Planning Department identified the parcel as surplus land in 1998.

Two other smaller parcels, located next to each other on West King Road, were included in the same purchase option as the "Fleming Meadows" land mentioned above. State Parks was interested in acquiring the land, and the County

Legislature authorized their sale, primarily because they provided an important trail connection opportunity between upper Buttermilk Falls State Park and the Finger Lakes Trail. In January 2006, it was discovered that the parcels had been logged by the former landowner following the date of foreclosure. Subsequently, the Department hired a professional forester to flag the boundary, establish the value of the timber that was stolen, and prepare a report attesting to the findings. State Parks reviewed the report and determined that the parcels are still of high interest to provide the trail connection to Buttermilk Falls State Park, and they intend to move forward with the land acquisition in 2007.

### **Snowmobile Trail Grant Program Administration**

New York State's Snowmobile Trail Grant Program encourages local snowmobile club stewardship and development of snowmobile trails in the State. Permissible uses of the funds include trail development and the maintenance of existing trails and trail facilities. The Tompkins County Planning Department has sponsored the application and administered the program on behalf of local snowmobile clubs since 1998. No new mileage was funded by the State in the 2006-2007 snowmobile season, so the program size remained the same. The program was funded on behalf of five snowmobile clubs, maintaining 106 miles of trails for snowmobile use in Tompkins County.

### **STOP-DWI Program**

**Program Transition** – The STOP-DWI Program was transferred from County Administration to the Planning Department during the last quarter of 2003. After consultation with the affected County departments, law enforcement agencies in the County, and the STOP-DWI Advisory Board, the Tompkins County Legislature transferred responsibility for administration of the program to the District Attorney's office effective the first of 2007. The latter portion of the year was, thus, focused on coordinating with the District Attorney's office to update files and data, prepare a budget to reflect the transfer, and transfer operations of the program.

**Arrest Statistics** - Arrest statistics for the first three quarters of 2006 show significant activity throughout the law enforcement community. Of the 212 DWI arrests reported, the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office accounted for 29% followed by the New York State Police with 23%. The Ithaca Police Department (18%), the village police departments (12%), and the university and park police (17%) all contributed greatly to the enforcement of DWI laws in the County.

### **General Municipal Law Development Reviews**

One hundred and seventy four projects were reviewed under New York State General Municipal Law section 239 - l, -m, and -n. Referrals were received from 13 of the 16 municipalities in the county. Projects included amendments to zoning ordinances, adoption of comprehensive plans, approval of site plans and subdivisions, issuances of special permits, and requests for use and area variances. Of these projects, thirteen were found to have potentially significant negative intercommunity or County-wide impacts, and recommendations were made to modify the projects to mitigate those impacts.

### *Planning Department Website*

Staff from the Tompkins County Planning Department and Information Technology Services have worked diligently to create a user-friendly structure and easily accessible content for an entirely redesigned Planning Department website. Since the Department is using the web more frequently in outreach and education efforts to the public, it is important that the site be easy for people to use in finding topics of interest, as well as pleasant to view. It is anticipated that the new website will be operational in 2007.

### *Advisory Boards*

The Tompkins County Planning Department provides staff support to the Environmental Management Council, the Planning Advisory Board and the Tompkins County Water Resources Council, which serves as the water quality coordinating committee for Tompkins County.

### *Tompkins County Water Resources Council*

Select accomplishments of the WRC in 2006 include:

- Development of a preliminary monitoring plan for the southern end of Cayuga Lake.
- Review of data collected for the Cornell University Lake Source Cooling Facility and submission of comments to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. These comments included a recommendation to continue all monitoring efforts underway for Lake Source Cooling and identification of additional monitoring needs for the community.
- Submission of comments on proposed changes to the Town of Ithaca boat dock regulations. This effort included an inventory and review of boat dock regulations in the Finger Lakes Region that was shared with other Tompkins County municipalities that have lakeshore frontage.
- Development and distribution of a brochure highlighting recreational opportunities for paddling and rowing in Cayuga Inlet and the southern end of Cayuga Lake.

### *Environmental Management Council*

Highlights of EMC activities for 2006 include:

- Passing resolutions in support of EMC membership in the New York Energy Smart Partnership, recommending environmental review of and fencing for the dog park on the City of Ithaca's Festival Lands, and supporting development of alternative fuels in New York State.
- Participating in the Earthday celebration with a display at the Farmer's Market and promoting the bagless shopping campaign at the Ithaca Festival and America Recycles Day.
- Providing information from the Energy Committee in support of City of Ithaca and Town of Dryden wind energy ordinances.
- Commenting on six municipal and state projects or plans by the Environmental Review Committee, including two subdivisions with potential impacts on Unique Natural Areas, and the County Airport's obstruction identification project.

### *Planning Advisory Board*

The Planning Advisory Board was involved in the following in 2006:

- Providing comment and input on the Planning Department's Work Program.
- Reviewing and commenting on proposed additions to County agricultural districts.
- Providing input on program changes to allow new construction under the Homeownership Program.
- Approving Interim Guidelines and recommending the first commitment of funds from the Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic and Recreational Resource Protection.
- Approval by the Housing Committee of the draft Housing Strategy for Tompkins County.

## ***Online Resources . . . just a click away!***

Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/compplan/index.htm>

Indicators of Success

[http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/annual%20reports/Indicators\\_Report\\_Final\\_Draft%20b.pdf](http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/annual%20reports/Indicators_Report_Final_Draft%20b.pdf)

Affordable Housing Needs Assessment

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/HNA/countywidehousingneedsassessment.htm>

Tompkins County Forest Management Plan

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/Rural%20Resources/documents/FinalForestPlan.pdf>

Benefits of Riparian Areas and Stream Buffers

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/Water%20Resources/FINAL%20STREAM%20DOC.pdf>

DRAFT Tompkins County Conservation Plan: A Strategic Approach to Natural Resource Stewardship

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/NFFA/project.htm>

Tompkins County Walkability Assessment Methodology and Case Studies

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/Walkability/Walkability.htm>

Tompkins County Multi-Jurisdictional All-Hazards Mitigation Plan

[http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/haz\\_mit.htm](http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/haz_mit.htm)